

CD 2011--66/67



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Chamber Music Series

Ebène Quartet

Monday, April 11, 2011

7:30 pm. Walter Hall

Edward Johnson Building

2010-11

A joyous music season

THE EBÈNE QUARTET

Pierre Colombet, violin
Gabriel Le Magadure, violin
Mathieu Herzog, viola
Raphaël Merlin, cello

PROGRAM

Quartet No. 3

Béla Bartók

(1881-1945)

5 { Prima parte: Moderato -
Seconda parte: Allegro -
Ricapitolazione della prima parte: Moderato -
Coda: Allegro molto

Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

Claude Debussy

(1862-1918)

2 Animé et très décidé
3 Assez vif et bien rythmé
4 Andantino, doucement expressif
5 Très modéré; très mouvementé et avec passion

~~ad libitum~~ attacca


INTERMISSION

Jazz and Pop Standards, reimagined by the Ebène Quartet

1. Footprint - Wayne Shorter
2. Nature Boy - Eben Ahbez
3. Misirlou (from *Pulp Fiction*) - Milton Leeds, Fred Wise, N. Roubanis, S.K. Russell
4. Unrequited - Brad Mehldau
5. Libertango - Astor Piazzolla
6. All Blues & So What - Miles Davis
7. Come together - Beatles

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Program Notes

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

Quartet No. 3

Bartók was preoccupied with the problems and solutions of string quartet writing throughout his life. Apart from the six surviving quartets whose dates of composition span more than 30 years (Quartet No. 1 was written in 1908, No. 6 in 1939), he composed but later suppressed a quartet as early as 1899, and shortly before his death he was planning and sketching another. This intense focus on a single musical form is revealing. In the last two centuries most composers of note have written at least one string quartet, but only a few have written a quantity of them. The great quartet composers of the past were Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. In the last century perhaps only Bartók and Shostakovich have written quartets worthy to stand in such company. To listen to Bartók's string quartets sequentially is to become immersed in a compelling and mesmerizing musical journey revealing the maturation of a profound artistic and humanitarian intellect.

According to musicologist James Goodfriend, the mystique of the string quartet is twofold: "In the first place, it must be classically controlled and balanced. In the second, it must express the composer's innermost feelings. The relationship between a quartet and a symphony, for example, is much like that of poetry and prose: they may each say similar things, but the former must say it with fewer words and with greater restrictions." In addressing these challenges

Bartók forged a highly personal style combining unique instrumental colors, astringent harmonies, and themes and rhythms derived from his studies of Hungarian and Balkan folk music with classical structures such as sonata or variation forms. From his search for a unifying principle came the ideas of motivic generation (in place of clearly differentiated themes) and continuous development. All of these characteristic features are strongly apparent in the third quartet.

The String Quartet No. 3 was completed in 1927 when Bartók was 46 years old. He entered the quartet in a competition sponsored by the Musical Fund of Philadelphia, and that same year made his first visit to the U.S. for a concert tour on which he played his first piano concerto, then recently completed. Back in Budapest the following year, Bartók was astonished to learn that he had shared first prize in the contest with the Italian composer, Alfredo Casella. Never financially well-off, the \$3000, which constituted his share of the prize, was of considerable help to him. Bartók's quartet in fact is based on only 2 or 3 brief, pithy motifs that continually change and evolve in ingenious fashion into new motifs, fugue subjects, harmonies, and rhythmic patterns. Although the piece is in one movement there are 4 sections, designated *Prima parte*, *Seconda parte*, *Ricapitolazione della Prima parte*, and *Coda*, the latter actually based on musical materials from the *Seconda parte*. Effectively then this is an A-B-A-B design, but there is not one measure that is the same in the first part and its recapitulation or in

the second part and the coda. One of the oldest musical devices is used to hold this music together- the distinct and easily recognized rhythmic figure. Another building tool is Bartók's use of instrumental colors- *pizzicatos*, *glissandos*, *col legnos* (hitting the string with the wood of the bow), and *sul ponticellos* (playing near the bridge of the instruments producing an icy, glassy sound)- in a structural way as "color motifs." The concept of color motifs has been taken up by many subsequent composers including György Kurtág and another Hungarian composer, Györgi Ligeti whose second string quartet is based to a large extent on this device.

The Quartet No. 3 opens *Moderato* with a canon in which an ornamented theme interweaves with the same theme unornamented. The *Prime parte* is an arch form with a central section more insistent than its framing parts. The *Seconda parte*, *Allegro*, is highly rhythmic and strongly reminiscent of Balkan folk dance music. In the *Ricapitulazione*, announced by a brief passage for solo cello, the material from the first part is reorganized and condensed into about half its original length. The Coda, commencing after a second appearance of a solo cello passage, incorporates a variety of canons and fugues based on motifs from the second part and drives to a whirlwind conclusion.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (B.1960) **Quartet in G minor, Op. 10**

The period around 1890 was a crucial time in Debussy's life. The composer had just returned to Paris after a two-year Prix de Rome residency in Italy and was eager to rid himself of the restraints of the academicians.

One of the first works in which he struck a new artistic direction was the Quartet in G minor, which, along with *L'Après-midi d'un faune* from the same time, established what is called the Impressionist style in music. Its varied tonal effects, soulful beauty, and freedom of form and structure provide an excellent musical counterpart to the Impressionist paintings and Symbolist poetry of the time.

The opening notes of the first movement are of overriding importance. They make up the germ, the melodic cell, from which the entire quartet unfolds and grows. This germinal motif is a rather rough-sounding motto; rhythmically complex and melodically convoluted, it zigzags back and forth within a comparatively limited tessitura. A distinguishing feature is the rapid three-note ornamental fillip at the central turning point.

Following the short motif and its repetition, three other melodies are heard. They come between restatements of the motif, each time, though in a slightly different form. The various themes, and especially the opening motto, are then heard in an imaginative procession of transformed shapes and guises - now surging with great passion, now stated in stentorian splendor, now stretched and drawn out in length, now plaintively sung - until the movement races to its climactic resolution.

The second movement offers a profusion of sparkling tonal effects, led by the viola playing an obstinately repeated, quickened version of the motif. Above, beneath, and all around this ostinato figure, the other instruments furnish brilliant pizzicato flourishes and scintillating cross-rhythms. The cello brings this

section to a close and establishes the murmuring accompaniment for the first violin playing the opening motif leisurely augmentation. Sections of new and derived melodic material follow, including a rhythmically attractive pizzicato passage in which the original motto is transformed into five-beat meter. Then, just as the cello seems to be starting the murmuring accompaniment again, the movement fades away.

After false starts by the second violin and viola, the third movement starts with the first violin softly singing a languid melody that rocks gently back and forth in pitch. The viola next seizes one fragment of the melody and expands it into a slightly faster theme. Another theme, also introduced by the viola, includes the three-note figure of the opening motto. It is worked up to an impassioned climax before a return of the quiet rocking theme brings the movement to a subdued conclusion.

The introduction to the final movement, also based on the original motif, continues the quiet mood. The music grows somewhat more animated as the cello starts a fugue-like passage, using a further transformation of the germinal motif. The fast part of the last movement then starts with a rapid, cluster-of-notes theme in the viola. From the final notes of this theme, Debussy spins out another melody. The shared notes of both themes become the accompaniment for the motif, this theme in grandiose elongation. A reminder of the opening theme of this movement leads to a coda and conclusion that provide a final, exciting glimpse of the considerably altered germinal motto.

Completed early in 1893, the quartet was dedicated to the Ysaÿe Quartet, which gave the first performance in Paris on December 29, 1893.

*Notes from Guide to Chamber Music by
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Chamber Music Master Class with members of the Ebène Quartet

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

10 am – noon. Walter Hall.

Open to the public. Free admission.

Ebène Quartet



Distinguished by its youth, open-mindedness, and versatility, France's Ebène Quartet has had a meteoric rise to the top. Now among the world's most sought-after quartets, the Quartet made its U.S. debut tour in March 2009 to widespread, dazzling critical acclaim. The tour featured performances in Boston, Seattle, Washington, D.C., and at Carnegie Hall. In October 2009, the Ebène Quartet won "Recording of the Year" at the 2009 Classic FM Gramophone Awards for their CD of Debussy, Ravel, and Fauré string quartets, only the fourth time that a chamber ensemble has won this prestigious prize. This same recording was named *Gramophone's* December 2008 Editor's Choice and received five-star ratings from both *BBC Music Magazine* and London's *Sunday Times*.

In the 2008-2009 season, the Quartet participated in a Haydn cycle at London's Wigmore Hall, with the Emerson, Hagen, and Arcanto Quartets. The Ebène celebrated the Haydn Year at Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts, and performed

in other notable venues including the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Zurich's Tonhalle, Vienna's Musikverein, the City of London Festival, and Gstaad's Menuhin Festival. In the summer of 2010 the Quartet made its Tanglewood and Mostly Mozart debuts.

The Ebène Quartet's live Haydn CD (Mirare, Harmonia Mundi) was released in February 2006 to unanimous worldwide praise, including a selection of "Album of the Month" by *The Strad*. As part of its multi-year deal with Virgin Classics, the Ebène released a Brahms CD in the fall of 2009, and released a jazz and crossover CD - *FICTION* - in the autumn of 2010. This improvisatory recording with the group known in France as "The Other Ebène" featured collaborators of international stature, including the singer Natalie Dessay.

Considered one of the finest quartets of its generation, the Quartet was named *BBC Music Magazine's* 2009 Newcomer of the Year, and was also nominated for the renowned Les Victoires de la Musique Classique Chamber Music Ensemble of the Year for 2009. In June 2006, the Ebène was admitted to the esteemed BBC New Generation Artists Scheme, and in 2004 was awarded the First Prize of the prestigious ARD Competition in Munich, as well as the Audience Prize, two Prizes for the best interpretation, and the Karl Klöner Foundation Prize.

The EBÈNE QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
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2011 Award Winner

Montecristo Trio

Jamie Kruspe, violin, Brandon Wilkie, cello, Chairat Chongvattanakij, piano

Schubert Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op 99

Honourable Mentions

Emily Kruspe, violin, Coco Chen, violin, Jesse Morrison, viola, Chris Hwang, cello

Ravel Quartet

Eros Tang, violin, Amahl Arulanandam, cello, Florence Mak, piano

Smetana Piano Trio

Monday, April 18, 2011

7:30 pm. Walter Hall

Pay what you can at the door. Proceeds to benefit the Felix Galimir Chamber Music Scholarship Fund.



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